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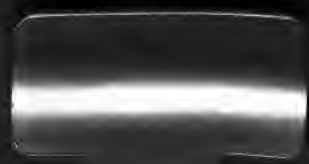
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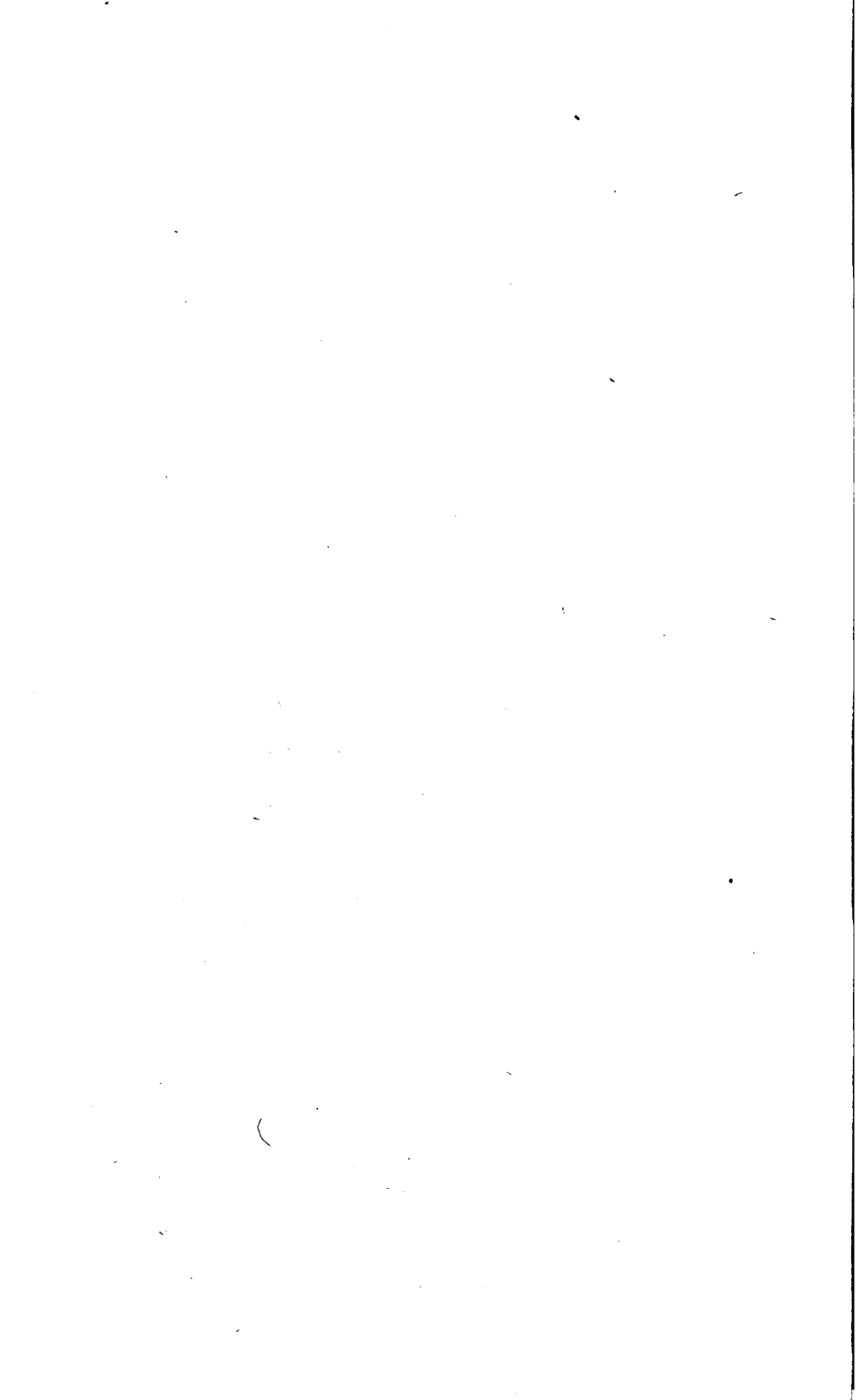


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Jephthah's Daughter: A
Biblical Drama in One
Act: by Elma Ehrlich
Levinger

Samuel French: Publisher
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Jephthah's Daughter

A BIBLICAL DRAMA IN ONE ACT

BY

ELMA EHRLICH LEVINGER

AUTHOR OF "THE BURDEN," "PLAYMATES IN EGYPT,"
"THE NEW LAND"

PRIZE PLAY

DRAMA LEAGUE OF AMERICA

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New York
SAMUEL FRENCH
Publisher
28-30 West 38th Street

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26 Southampton St., Strand

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TIME: *A spring morning in the days of the Judges.*

PLACE: *Before the house of JEPHTHAH, on the road to Mizpeh.*

CHARACTERS

JEPHTHAH, a man of Gilead

SHEILAH, his only child

ELAD, his father

DINAH, Sheilah's old nurse

AMASA, an elder in Israel

NATHAN, his son

RACHEL, Amasa's daughter

ZEBUL, the singer

JOSIAH, comrade of Jephthah

MICHAEL young girls of Mizpeh

TIRZAH

SOLDIERS, people of Mizpeh

Jephthah's Daughter

(The house of JEPHTHAH is a humble, low-roofed affair with several flat stones forming the stairs; rude stone pillars either side the door. A few rocks forming a natural rostrum. We hear a girl's voice singing, within the house, a weirdly impassioned chant of battle and triumphant pride, strangely blended with religious fervor. Still singing, SHEILAH comes out of the house, the lap of her scarlet robe heaped high with flowers which she twines among the garlands already about the posts. She is a slender, dark girl of about sixteen, now shyly dreaming, now running over with youth and happiness. Tissot has drawn her well in his tanned, vibrant young Jewess with the thoughtful eyes. As she works, she sings half absently the old song of her people, the song of Miriam by the sea, improvising, now and then, her voice thrilling with joyful pride.)

SHEILAH:

The Lord is my strength and my song
And He is become my salvation;
Him will I praise from morning until evening;
The Lord has heard the sound of my lamentation;
He has given ear unto my cry:
Therefore will I exalt Him without ceasing.

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Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods?
Who is like thee, glorious in holiness,
Fearful in praises, doing wonders?

The Lord is my strength and my song
And He is become my salvation;
He has set my foot upon the neck of those who hated
me,
He has decked me in their robes of blue and purple,
Therefore will I exalt him without ceasing,
Therefore will my praises ascend by day and by
night.

(DINAH comes from the house, a wrinkled woman
with graying hair, but vigorous and upright.
She always addresses the girl with a sort of
chiding tenderness.)

DINAH. Shame, idle child, shame! Why did you
run away and leave me with the hearth unswept and
the dough still within the kneading trough?
(Grumbling.) A pretty damsel to rule the home—
and you are woman grown!

(SHEILAH laughing saucily over her shoulder, gives
a final pat to her garlands, and, taking some
bread from the flat straw basket upon the steps,
begins to scatter crumbs to the birds.)

DINAH. (With increasing wrath) You pay less
heed to me than to the chirping of those noisy spar-
rows. Come in at once and help me with my tasks,
lest all Mizpeh say I let you run as wild as a goat
upon the hills. Come in, I say!

SHEILAH. (Shaking her off laughingly) Nurse,
nurse, leave me in peace and give your scolding
tongue a holiday, for is it not high festival in Miz-

peh? (*She runs up the steps to rearrange a loose garland.*) Surely, I should twine these doorposts with garlands when my own father is returning from battle to-day and all Mizpeh will strew flowers before his victorious feet.

DINAH. (*Still grumbling*) Ay, at last the folk of Mizpeh know his worth. Those who spit on our poor house when passing will fling wide the city's gate at his coming and call themselves his friends.

SHEILAH. The lords of Mizpeh have grown his friends—nay, his bondmen. My father went forth an outcast; he will return a king. (*Swaying as in a triumphant dance, a garland above her head.*) He has overcome Ammon! The garments of the princes of Ammon are become a carpet to his feet that he may come as a king unto Mizpeh.

DINAH. (*Shaking her head gloomily*) Yea, rejoice in the thoughtlessness of your youth. Dance and sing in triumph and never a thought of your mother who will not be with the others at the city's gate to sound timbrels to his glory.

SHEILAH. (*With a sudden change of mood, gravely tender as she throws herself beside DINAH, now seated on the doorsill*) Poor mother! If she had not died when I was born—if she might only stand among the women and hear him praised in the gates. Perhaps, it might redeem a little the years of misery she spent for his sake.

DINAH. (*Soothing her*) Nay, my little one, forget the jeers and the injuries. Your mother was woman grown when she wedded, and she knew what grief awaited her as the wife of Jephthah, an outlaw in Israel.

SHEILAH. (*Indignantly*) My father's shame was not of his own making!

DINAH. Surely, he suffered for no sin of his own. But the sons of Elad, his father, could never forget

that Jephthah was the son of a woman of Moab and they hated him for it. His youth was made bitter as the child of a strange woman; when he grew to manhood and found a maiden brave enough to be his wife, her brethren drove them out of Mizpeh with stones and curses.

SHEILAH. (*With scorn*) And for this bridal blessing, for the long years of hatred for him and his, my father avenges himself—by saving his persecutors from Ammon. Less generous would I have shown myself to those who scorned me.

DINAH. (*Chuckling*) Generous! Nay, daughter of Jephthah, your father showed himself a shrewd maker of bargains. Ere he buckled on his armor, did he not exact heavy payment from Gilead? Did he not demand full recognition as son of the tribe—nay, more, that if he brought low the children of Ammon, he should rule as a king in Mizpeh.

SHEILAH. (*Rising and gravely bowing before an imaginary monarch*) Greeting to you, O lord and king! Enter the gates of our city and be ruler over Mizpeh. Greeting to you, O warriors of Israel, who have saved us out of the hand of Ammon.

DINAH. (*Dryly, as she rearranges several garlands*) And greeting to Nathan, son of Amasa, right hand of Jephthah in battle, flower of the youths of Mizpeh!

SHEILAH. (*Half angrily*) Cease, Dinah—

DINAH. (*With shrewd humor*) Why should I hold my peace when every tongue in Mizpeh wags with your secret? Even before the sons of Gilead cried on Jephthah for aid, every old wife in Mizpeh knew that Nathan, son of Amasa, had pleaded with your father for your hand.

SHEILAH. (*Protesting*) We are not betrothed.

DINAH. (*Teasingly*) It were well you wore the bridal veil to-day to hide your blushes—even at his

name. Your father himself told me that should young Nathan prove himself worthy in battle——

SHEILAH. He never told me of his love.

DINAH. (*With a grimace*) These eyes are growing dim. But they could read his face when he bade you farewell and begged you for a trinket to wear in battle. (*Pulling aside one of the girl's long sleeves.*) Where is the golden bracelet your mother wore upon her wedding day?

SHEILAH. (*Looking away*) I——

DINAH. (*Smiling*) He will bring it back to-day and you will wear it again—and the ring of betrothal also.

SHEILAH. I would not have him see me so meanly clad, when all the maids of Mizpeh wear their festal robes. (*Her arms about DINAH, she speaks pleadingly.*) Dear Dinah, help me plait my hair and let me don fair robes that I may do grace to those who return triumphant from the wars.

DINAH. (*Who has been resting on the doorsill again, rises, grumbling*) Must I leave my work unfinished to deck you? You are fair enough in these.

SHEILAH. I would be like a queen before Mizpeh. (*Petting DINAH.*) You will surely unlock the chest in which years ago you laid away my mother's bridal robe and the jewels she wore upon her bridal day. (*As DINAH hesitates and shakes her head.*) My father said that they should all be mine when I was a grown woman. Surely, he would be pleased to see me wear them upon this day of days.

DINAH. (*Grumbling, but eager*) Yes, you must have them. They will suit you well, though you are less stately than your mother . . . and not half so fair. (*She looks away wistfully, dreaming.*) But you shall be decked like a princess on her bridal day, for the time has come.

SHEILAH. (*Half afraid*) I am but a simple

maid. Perhaps I should not wear my mother's bridal garments.

DINAH. (*Soothing away her fears*) You are a child no longer—little one. (*Drawing her up the stairs.*) Come in with me . . . not stately like your mother . . . but the robes will suit you well. (*As they stand in the doorway, RACHEL, MICHAL and TIRZAH, three young girls, laughing and radiant, their arms filled with flowers, run in.*)

RACHEL. Sheilah, Sheilah, why have you not joined us at the city's gate? We are waiting for your father—

TIRZAH. We must make haste—

MICHAL. (*Holding out her hand*) Hurry—hurry—

SHEILAH. (*Proudly, but without anger*) Once, Rachel, you were not so eager to be my friend and playmate. You even censored Nathan, your brother, for crying out to me, as I passed, to join in your games.

RACHEL. That was long years ago. To-day—

TIRZAH. To-day you are the proudest woman heart in all Mizpeh. Come, forgive us our past mockery and join our festal procession to greet your father.

MICHAL. (*Taking SHEILAH's hand timidly*) Surely, you forgive us.

SHEILAH. (*With a happy laugh*) To-day I must forgive you—and all Mizpeh—for I am so happy. (*She bends down and kisses little MICHAL's upturned face.*) I am glad you will be my friends—I have been hungry for love and friendship all my days.

DINAH. (*Cynically*) Ay, we all pay homage even to the dog—if he protect our sheepfold. (*As the girls, laughing and talking among themselves, are about to drag off SHEILAH.*) Shameless one—have I not taught you better than to run before the gath-

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'ered folk with tangled hair and in unseemly garments?

SHEILAH. (*Dancing back to her nurse*) Girls, I will join you at the city's gate. But first—ah, wait until you see me in my queenly robes. (*With a mock salaam.*) In paying me homage you will forget even my father's glory.

TIRZAH. You will be late——

SHEILAH. Nay, I will be with you to lead the festal dance before my father. (*The girls run out laughing and talking. SHEILAH is about to follow DINAH when she stops a moment, her eyes on the distant hills, her face glowing with joy.*)

SHEILAH. (*Her voice a little hushed at the beauty of it all*) Ah, Dinah, it is good to be alive on a spring morning when the birds are building their nests and singing of golden summer days. (*Her voice breaking a little.*) I am so happy I want to run and dance and laugh—and cry. For soon my father will return to me, no longer an outcast, but as a king over all Gilead.

DINAH. (*With gentle satire*) And with him Nathan, king of men.

SHEILAH. (*Simply*) And Nathan, the youth who played with me, although the others laughed, and helped me search for the first shy flowers many springs ago.

DINAH. (*Kissing her*) Come, let me deck you in your mother's bridal robes, for the time has come. (*They go into the house together.*)

(*A moment's pause. A group of soldiers, among them NATHAN, and JOSIAH, enter and pass across the stage toward Mizpeh. Last of all come JEPHTHAH and his father, ELAD. JEPHTHAH is a mighty man, broad of shoulder, bull-throated, clad in armor. His eyes are keen as a*

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sword; about his mouth the shameful years have left bitter lines not even his present pride can erase. ELAD is a bent old man with a calm, cold face. He walks with a staff and sinks upon the rocks to rest.)

JEPHTHAH. (*With a mocking gesture*) Welcome to Jephthah's palace, O father. It has long been the target of the stones and curses of my neighbors. (*His face softens as he notices the garlands about the doorposts; he touches one caressingly.*) My little Sheilah's handiwork. The one thing in all the word to love me when I wore the brand of shame.

ELAD. (*Wincing at the unspoken reproach*) How could I acknowledge you before the people?

JEPHTHAH. Surely, there was little pride in being father of the foreign woman's son. But to-day—(*With a swift gesture.*)—ah, to-day, I cast aside my ancient shame and my ancient hatreds. My tribe that once cast me out will receive me with timbrels, with singing and with garlands of victory. (*Lifting one of the garlands from the door.*) Nay, more: they will keep their bargain and I will be more than a son of Gilead; I will rule the people and dwell as a king in Mizpeh. Have I not done well, O my father?

ELAD. Yea, too well.

JEPHTHAH. (*About to enter the house, comes back to where ELAD sits*) I do not understand.

ELAD. I fear the good fortune which raises a man from the dunghill to the throne. The Lord when He gives too generously with one hand, withdraws with the other. He has given you all too bountifully of glory—He will demand payment.

JEPHTHAH. Let Him demand payment and I will pay.

ELAD. (*Shaking his gray head*) Beware of idle

boasting lest you stumble in your pride. The Lord God is not as a merchant in the marketplace that you can bargain with Him.

JEPHTHAH. Nay, let Him demand payment and I will mete out to Him with just weights and a just measure. Did I not demand payment of the men of Gilead? And have they not paid? Shall I be less honest even with the Lord?

ELAD. (*Rising*) He may demand heavy payment. O my son, I am fearful for you. Perhaps, too fearful; but since my Simeon fell in battle yestermorn, I have no son but you and I tremble lest misfortune cross the doorsill of your house. All my hopes lie in you and Sheilah, the last of our blood in Israel, seeing that you have no other child and all my other sons are dead.

JEPHTHAH. (*Throwing off his slight foreboding*) See—I have only to stretch forth my hand and I grasp—(*Catching one of the loose garlands.*)—victory, glory, praise before the sons of Gilead. True, as you say, I have risen from the dunghill. (*Exultantly.*) But who can drag me from my throne?

ELAD. (*Quietly*) God!

JEPHTHAH. (*Proudly*) Let Him call me to account and I will answer Him according to His reckoning.

ELAD. Vows made in storms are forgotten in calms. What of your vow?

JEPHTHAH. (*His face suddenly sharp and troubled*) My vow? Perhaps I did indeed do evil in His sight to vow rashly and seek to bribe the living God? (*Unconsciously, he grips his sword, as the battle lives again before his eyes.*) Near midnight and we had waged battle against Ammon since sunrise. My men exhausted, bleeding, nigh unto death. My sword arm weak and wounded. From the hills pale fires burning where those of Ammon offered up

sacrifices to their gods and prayed for victory. Could I have done otherwise, O my father?

ELAD. Beware false vows which lead to shame and dishonor. The vow which God has heard must be fulfilled.

JEPHTHAH. (*Sweeping on*) Leaning upon the arm of Nathan, son of Amasa, I groped my way from the field. I had thought to fall on my sword, for I dared not fall alive into the hand of the Gentiles. Under the stars I cried upon the Lord—and He answered me.

ELAD. (*Sternly*) Yea, you called upon Him even as the heathen called upon their gods that night, offering strange flesh upon their altars in the hills.

JEPHTHAH. I was mad—mad with my pain and weariness—and fear. I, even I, Jephthah, knew fear at that moment. Not for myself, for my sword was ready, and though curs worry a dead lion, he feels not their fangs. But I feared for Sheilah, my little dove, whom my death would leave alone in the forest, prey to every snare of the fowler, daughter of an outcast in Israel.

ELAD. (*Softening a little*) So it was for little Sheilah you wrought this sin before the Lord?

JEPHTHAH. He will not account it for sin, as in my madness I knew not what I vowed.

ELAD. But I was not mad—nor was Nathan, son of Amasa, and we heard without mistaking the words you spoke before the Lord. (*Sternly.*) Has your madness left you that you in the light of day can recall the wild vow you pledged there in the darkness?

JEPHTHAH. (*Striving to speak calmly*) Surely, I recall the vow I made unto the Lord before He sent strength back into my arms and hope into my soul. (*Repeats with a sort of awed hesitancy.*) I vowed unto the Lord and said, "If Thou wilt in-

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deed deliver the children of Ammon into my hand, whatsoever cometh out of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, it shall be the Lord's and I will offer it up for a burnt offering."

ELAD. So did you vow—a rash vow and unholy from the mouth of a son of Israel.

JEPHTHAH. Can one come forth from a tomb? My house is as empty as a conquered city. Sheilah and Dinah, her nurse, have gone to join the women in Mizpeh who will dance before me with timbrels and with rejoicing. (NATHAN, *who has previously passed, now re-enters, flowers twined about his sword and helmet.*) Ah, my good Nathan, have you seen your brethren?

NATHAN. Yea, my lord Jephthah, and it is well with them, even my aged father, Amasa. He comes with the other elders of Mizpeh to welcome you who have saved them out of the hand of Ammon. Growing impatient, they will seek you here.

JEPHTHAH. (*Nodding approval*) They come to do me honor. And my little Sheilah? Did she not shine bravely forth among the maids of Mizpeh?

NATHAN. (*Anxiously*) Nay, my lord. She was not with the others. But my sister Rachel said she remained at home to deck herself.

JEPHTHAH. (*In sudden fear*) Is she within? (*Unconsciously he turns to his own door, crying out.*) Sheilah!

SHEILAH. (*Within*) Nay, Dinah, the circlet is fastened. Hasten—my father calls! (SHEILAH *comes bounding from the house, dressed in robes of white and rich purples and blues, a jeweled circlet and silvered veil about her head, timbrels in her hands.*)

SHEILAH. I am the first to greet you. Welcome home.

NATHAN. (*Crying out in terror*) Back! Back!

JEPHTHAH. (*Trying to push her hands away as she seeks to embrace him*) Return unto the house—return. (*Frantically.*) Why did you come forth?

SHEILAH. (*Amazed*) To bid you welcome. (*Again trying to throw her arms about him as he turns away.*) Father, look at me.

JEPHTHAH. (*Hoarsely*) What have I done that God should hate me so?

SHEILAH. (*In hurt wonderment*) Father! (*She goes shyly to ELAD and bends to kiss his hand. He raises her and embraces her, his stern face quivering with emotion. She goes back to her father, timidly taking his hand.*) Perhaps you are wroth to see me robed in these? Dinah permitted me to deck myself thus, for she thought that it would please you to see me in my mother's festal garments. (*Shyly, her eyes falling before NATHAN'S admiring glance.*) She said that they became me. (*Falling before her father, she spreads out her glittering robes.*) Father, will you not look at me?

NATHAN. (*Raising her and trying to draw her away*) Fret not your father.

SHEILAH. But I have not seen him these many months and now——

NATHAN. He is spent and worn after his wounds and many battles.

SHEILAH. (*Now all tender concern*) Father—you, perchance, are faint from your long march beneath the burning sun? (*He nods, unable to speak.*) Then, come, and I will take your helmet and your spear. (*Smilingly she disarms him.*) See, Nathan, again I act as armorbearer to a captain in Israel. Give me your cloak, O my father. (*Her hands are filled; she pauses a moment to lean her head upon*

his shoulder.) I will bring a cooling drink for you and you must rest before we go down into Mizpeh together.

JEPHTHAH. (*To NATHAN*) Take her away. I cannot bear to look upon her face.

NATHAN. (*To SHEILAH, relieving her of her burden as he leads her into the house*) Come—I will bear these things within for you. And Dinah, your nurse, will help us to prepare a drink to refresh your father. (*The two go into the house, talking together, SHEILAH casting a glance at her father, half entreaty, half fear.*)

JEPHTHAH. (*After a long silence, avoiding ELAD'S eyes*) The Lord cannot demand payment now. I knew not what I vowed.

ELAD. (*Quietly*) The vow that God has heard must be fulfilled.

JEPHTHAH. (*Pleading*) You must be silent. My victories have left me as a king; my wealth, my power—what are they worth without her, my only child, seeing that beside her I have neither sons nor daughters. And I will not play the miser with you—if you forget my vow, as I must do.

ELAD. I am an man of honor, an elder in Israel: yet you dare stain my ears with bribes!

JEPHTHAH. (*With sudden craft*) Bribes? Am I not your son—even before the people—and are not my possessions and my praises yours? Now wealth will I give to keep your age from want and in Mizpeh's gates shall my voice praise your name, bidding all men show you reverence.

ELAD. (*With quiet scorn*) What are the promises of one foresworn? First pay the debt you owe unto the Lord our God.

JEPHTHAH. (*Broken, his spirit all gone from him*) Hear me for pity, then, since neither gold nor honor buy your silence. My child is all to me.

Just now she stood there so like her own mother on her bridal day, I dreamed I saw her mother in her face . . . a stately maiden as beautiful as the sunrise . . . (*Abruptly.*) Is it nothing to you that my only child must die?

ELAD. (*With a sudden flare of anger*) It is much to me that the last of our blood must perish for your folly, that our line must end should Sheilah's eyes close in death ere she leaves a child to call her "mother."

JEPHTHAH. Then mercy—since your bereaved heart will bleed with mine above her grave. What joy will remain for either of us, if she be gone?

ELAD. (*Himself again*) Our joys and griefs are ripples on a stream. The vow that God has heard must be fulfilled.

JEPHTHAH. (*Eagerly*) Perchance a vow made before the altar of the Lord and in the open day. But no man heard my vow save young Nathan, son of Amasa; and he loves her as his own soul. He will not chide me for my broken vow.

ELAD. But I heard—and I have not forgotten nor will I forget the vow you made before the Lord.

JEPHTHAH. Father!

ELAD. (*Unheeding*) I know with what rash promise you sought to bribe the Lord God and if your memory stumble I will seek ever to keep your vow before your eyes. If you dare tempt the anger of the Lord by mocking Him, His righteous anger will not flame for you alone, but will consume all our land by reason of your sin. He inclined His ear to your voice; He gave to you the desire of your heart. Surely, He heard your vow and it must be fulfilled.

JEPHTHAH. Though you are merciless to me—be kind to her. She is so young; the flower of her

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life is opening to the sun and a golden path stretches before her. She must not die.

ELAD. Death is a little thing, but honor great. The vow that God has heard must be fulfilled.

JEPHTHAH. (*Heavily, without anger*) I think you must be as merciless as God.

(*SHEILAH comes from the house bearing a goblet. She is followed by NATHAN and DINAH. The former looks greatly troubled in spite of his efforts to remain calm.*)

DINAH. (*With an obeisance to the two men*) Welcome, O my master. I have cared for the maid during your absence like a tender flower. (*Fondly.*) Is she not like a rose in her festal dress?

JEPHTHAH. (*Holding SHEILAH at arms' length and speaking with a terrible longing*) A rose that whispers summer to my heart!

SHEILAH. (*Looking up at him brightly*) Ah, now you are my good father again! Come, taste of the drink I have just prepared for you.

JEPHTHAH. (*Taking cup*) A bitter drink, you give to me, my child.

NATHAN. (*Hurriedly to JEPHTHAH as DINAH draws SHEILAH away fussily rearranging her veil*) See, the people of Mizpeh wait no longer. They will do you honor even before your house.

JEPHTHAH. (*Seizing his hand*) My vow!

NATHAN. It must be as though it had never been spoken. Only raise your head and look boldly upon the people, lest they think you a man afflicted by the hand of God.

(*The people of Mizpeh enter in festal procession, the elders, led by AMASA, at their head. The soldiers are in armor, their helmets and spears fes-*

JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER

tooned with flowers. The women and children carry flowers. ZEBUL, the singer, stands with his harp among the maidens who carry timbrels which they clash as they move.)

AMASA. (*As the great shouting dies away*) No longer would we bide by the city's gate to bid you welcome, O Jephthah. Great wonders have you wrought for us in the battlefield and all that is ours, our hands, our homes, our hearts, are yours, seeing that your hand has delivered us from the children of Ammon.

JEPHTHAH. (*Lifelessly*) Not I, but the Lord brought low our enemy. I conquered only in His name.

ELAD. (*Warningly*) And if a man deny him—

ZEBUL. (*Slight and boyish, clad in white and gold*) Women of Mizpeh, cast flowers before the feet of him who delivered us from Ammon. Maidens, sound your timbrels and cry aloud his name before all the people.

(The women and children shower JEPHTHAH with flowers as he stands on the doorsteps, his hand upon NATHAN'S shoulder, his face hard and white. Then, at a signal from ZEBUL, the maidens whirl into a festal dance, clashing their timbrels as they move. The dance is wild and barbaric in its fierce joy: through it all flashes the figure of JEPHTHAH'S daughter, who at the last, casts her timbrels aside and dances with her father's sword held in triumph above her head.)

PEOPLE OF MIZPEH. (*As dance ends and maidens prostrate themselves before JEPHTHAH*) Hail—Jephthah—hail!

A WOMAN. (*Bringing two little children to JEPH-*

JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER

21

THAH) Deliverer of Israel, may not my children kiss your garments' hem that in years to come they may boast of it, in speaking of this day of days?

JEPHTHAH. (*Drawing back as though in terror*) No—no.

AN OLD MAN. (*Richly dressed and followed by his slaves*) O my lord Jephthah, make glad the heart of your servant by accepting a few poor trinkets out of his hand. (*He presses upon JEPHTHAH two golden caskets he takes from his slaves.*) Accept these, my lord, and honor the giver in your acceptance. (*From one of the caskets, which JEPHTHAH with a gesture almost of horror has handed to NATHAN, he draws forth a glittering diadem*) I know this too mean a trifle to encircle the brow of him who saved us from Ammon. (*With the mock humility of the Orient.*) Though it has long been cherished in our house, for 'tis said my ancestor brought it out of Egypt and even Pharoah might have worn it without shame. (*With another bow.*) And deign to take these poor vials filled with rare oils and strange ointments, unworthy your notice, though they might anoint a king on his crowning day.

JEPHTHAH. (*Protesting*) No—no—not for me such gifts and such homage.

NATHAN. Be strong, my lord, and of good courage. (*Seeking to divert the people who have begun to look upon JEPHTHAH curiously, talking among themselves.*) Sing, Zebul, sing a festal song for our rejoicing.

VOICES. Take your harp, O singer of God, and play upon it.

(*ZEBUL rises upon the rocks and plays a prelude upon his harp before he begins his song. Whenever he pauses, the people continue, improvising in their joy.*)

ZEBUL:

I will sing unto the Lord,
I will sing praise to the Lord, the God of Israel.

WOMEN:

We will sing of the victories of Israel.

WARRIORS:

We will sing of the triumph of Jephthah before
the Lord.

WOMEN:

Lo, Ammon was upon us;
Ammon laid waste our cities,
And our virgins he carried into captivity.

WARRIORS:

We took up the sword against Ammon;
But Ammon stood as a rock,
And our hearts were troubled within us.

ZEBUL:

Then arose Jephthah like a star in the darkness,
Even as a star that brings deliverance in the night
season;
He unsheathed the sword and Ammon trembled be-
fore him;
He went forth into battle and the horsemen of Am-
mon fled before his coming.

JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER 23

WARRIORS:

The princes of Ammon fled, leaving their weapons
behind them;

WOMEN:

The women of Ammon wail upon the mountains for
those who return not from battle.

ZEBUL:

All this has Jephthah accomplished for the sake of
Israel:

He raised his hand and he conquered,
He went forth to battle and his captains divided the
spoil.

*(ZEBUL pauses for a moment, his fingers wandering
dreamily over the strings. ELAD comes close to
JEPHTHAH, his face stern and threatening.)*

ELAD. I will look no longer upon this mockery.
Every honor, every praise uttered to your name will
do more to kindle the anger of the God you have
denied. Strip yourself of deceit and show yourself
to the people for what you are—the breaker of your
oath even to God.

JEPHTHAH. *(Indicating SHEILAH as she stands
listening to NATHAN)* I cannot.

ELAD. Speak you—or I will speak.

AMASA. *(Warningly)* Hush—again the singer
speaks for God.

ZEBUL. *(His face rapt)*
I will sing unto the Lord,
I will sing praise unto the Lord, the God of Israel;

For with oil hath He filled my cup,
He hath filled my cup even to overflowing;
Therefore will I praise the Lord,
Therefore will I magnify His name forever and ever.

JEPHTHAH. (*Turning to ELAD and crying out passionately*) Cease with your music and rejoicing! (*ZEBUL comes down from his place on the rocks. The people look at each other in amazed fear.*)

SHEILAH. (*Throwing herself before her father*) Father—my father—what hidden grief tears at your heart? What bitter thing troubles you?

JEPHTHAH. (*Dully*) Alas, my daughter, you have brought me low. You alone trouble me. For I have sworn and I dare not turn back.

NATHAN. (*Coming to him quickly*) For her sake be silent.

ELAD. Speak, Jephthah—will you tell the people, or must I?

NATHAN. Peace—Elad—peace!

ELAD. Nay, he must speak, for who can hide from God? Speak, Jephthah—tell of your bargain with the Lord. Let the people judge betwixt you.

(*JEPHTHAH tries to speak, hesitates, turns away. The people murmur among themselves.*)

TIRZAH. The hand of God has touched him; he would speak and yet is dumb.

NATHAN. (*Pleadingly*) You will not tell them?

JEPHTHAH. I must speak; for if my tongue is silent he will accuse me. And I feel God is on his side, not mine. (*To the people.*) You praise me for my hard-won battles, the cities I have taken by my spear. Praise instead the Lord God of Israel who led me on and brought me at last unto victory.

AMASA. Surely, we praise Him without measure for saving us through your hand.

JEPHTHAH. If there be justice in Mizpeh, hear my words and judge fairly between me and this man, even my father. Learn how I bribed the Lord God to do battle for your sakes and brought victory out of His hand that Israel might not perish from the earth.

NATHAN. You are mad. I pray you do not speak.

JEPHTHAH. Nay, my son. Perhaps it is better that the men of Mizpeh decide this thing and bid me do what seems right in their eyes. Can I fear their decision, seeing that they are fathers with the love of their own children in their hearts? *(He turns again to the wondering people.)* Hear, then, how I bribed our God that He might lead us unto peace: I, even I, Jephthah, son of Elad, raised my hands to Him in the darkness and cried unto Him: "If Thou wilt indeed deliver the children of Ammon into my hand, whatsoever cometh out of my house to meet me when I return in peace, it shall be the Lord's and I will offer it up for a burnt offering."

SHEILAH. *(Half understanding)* My father!

JEPHTHAH. *(Appealing to NATHAN)* Were these the words I spoke to God?

NATHAN. *(Passionately)* He did not hear your words—He did not hear.

JEPHTHAH. *(To the people)* And as I approached the gates of Mizpeh to-day, my daughter came to meet me. These two know she was the first to come from out my house.

(DINAH holds SHEILAH in sudden terror. The people draw back.)

JEPHTHAH. Men of Mizpeh, men of Mizpeh, tell

me, must I keep such a vow made in the madness of battle when I knew not what I vowed?

AMASA. (*Doubtfully to ELAD*) Throughout Mizpeh and Gilead, men speak of your wisdom in the gates and come to you for judgment. Advise us out of your knowledge, O Elad, and tell us must he keep this vow.

ELAD. The vow that God has heard must be fulfilled. Else will His anger consume all Mizpeh and the people therein, because you forced not Jephthah to fulfill his vow.

JEPHTHAH. My friends—you are my friends, now that I have saved you from Ammon—friends, it was for your sake, I vowed and if I sinned I sinned for your sake, also. If I fail in payment and His anger be kindled against Mizpeh, will you not bear it willingly since it is I who saved you out of the hand of Ammon?

JOSIAH. (*Leaving his place among the warriors*) I am a soldier—a poor, plain man, not wise in the ways of the Lord as you, O elders in Israel. (*He indicates AMASA and ELAD.*) But this I know—Jephthah has fought for the Lord of Battles as no man ever fought for Him before. Surely, with Jephthah's blood shed upon the battlefield the Lord will wash out all remembrances of the vow he made for Mizpeh.

ELAD. Not so—for God remembers and is just.

JOSIAH. Then if He does indeed demand a sacrifice, since it was for Mizpeh Jephthah sinned, let one of Mizpeh atone. Let me be slain upon the altar. I have lived my days and there are none to mourn for me; but this young maid is like a meadow flower. (*Murmurs half of relief, half of anger among the people. JEPHTHAH seizes JOSIAH'S hand.*)

ELAD. Though a dozen men and maidens be offered upon the altar, yet will His wrath not dimin-

ish against Mizpeh. Yet will you harbor in your midst a mocker of God, a breaker of vows. If thus you seek to cheat the God of Truth, from this day no vow is safe in Israel.

ZEBUL. (*Rousing himself from his reverie*) If God require this child for a sacrifice, He will speak. But, surely, the maid is guiltless and she must not die.

ELAD. (*Bitterly*) Yet must all the guiltless in Mizpeh perish because we did not prevent Jephthah when he sought to break his vow?

NATHAN. (*Appealing to AMASA*) My father, you are the first of the elders of Mizpeh. You have the ear of the people even as Elad. Speak to them—urge them that they forbid Jephthah lay hand upon his child.

AMASA. (*Heavily*) My son—my son—and you sought her for your bride! (*He turns to the people waiting for his words, hesitates, goes to JEPHTHAH and takes his hand.*) I would that I might comfort you and yet only bitter words can fall from my tongue to-day. This youth—(*His hand on NATHAN's shoulder.*)—is very dear to me in the pride and splendor of his manhood. Yet had I vowed as you, and had the Lord God so smitten me for my presumption, him would I sacrifice to appease the righteous wrath of the Most High.

NATHAN. (*Protesting*) My father!

AMASA. I know that your child is your life, for we live only in our children. But can a man live without honor? Will the sons of men give heed to the pledges of one who has broken a vow made without compulsion and without force? No power in Israel can force you to do the thing that you have sworn to do, a thing so fearful that I dare not call it by name. But be warned, O Jephthah, that if you fail to keep your vow, every voice in Israel will

cry out against you as a son of shame, a thing without honor, a breaker of vows.

JEPHTHAH. (*Cowering*) Cease—cease——

NATHAN. (*Turning on his father*) I looked to you to plead for the maid for the sake of mercy, and you have shown no mercy. You prate of shame and honor and vows, and by your words would shed innocent blood. Tenderness do you feel for the honor of Jephthah, but you would send his daughter under the sacrificial knife.

AMASA. (*Shocked at his rebellion*) My son—you speak to your father!

NATHAN. Nay, I speak to an elder in Israel, who bears the name of Justice on his lips, but serves her not in his heart. And in seeking to do that which is pleasing to the Lord God, you men of wisdom and elders before the people have gone groping in the darkness. Cruelty has blinded your eyes and you stumble as you go. Cease then to prate of Justice, but learn to know her ways. For I, too, will call upon Justice to spare the daughter of Jephthah in her innocence.

(*Murmurs among the people. JEPHTHAH raises his haggard face, almost daring to hope.*)

NATHAN. (*Pointing to SHEILAH who stands near her father*) This maiden is my betrothed wife. Do not the elders in Israel know that her father has no power over her, that she was not his to dedicate to the Lord when he made his vow?

(*The people give a great cry of relief. JEPHTHAH breaks down utterly and gropes to reach SHEILAH, but she has already hurried to NATHAN, who clasps her in his arms.*)

NATHAN. (*As he draws her from the rest*) Be-

loved, will you take life from my hands at such a price? Will you wed me though I dared to speak of you as mine without a word from you to comfort me during these months of doubt and waiting?

SHEILAH. (*Shyly, not daring to look at him*) If you had not loved me, I should have been glad to die, for only in your love are joy and life for me.

DINAH. Praise to the God of Israel Who would not suffer the innocent to perish! (*She crosses to SHEILAH and embraces her tenderly, before leading her to her father.*)

JEPHTHAH. (*Brokenly, as he blesses her*) My daughter, my little white dove, will you forgive me?

SHEILAH. You knew not what you vowed. (*She goes a little timidly to ELAD who stands wrathfully apart.*) And have you no betrothal blessing for me, O my grandfather?

ELAD. (*In a voice of cold anger*) How can I bless that which the Lord has already cursed?

(*SHEILAH shrinks back, the people growing vaguely disturbed under the implied menace in his words.*)

AMASA. Hard words to welcome a bride in Israel!

ELAD. Better she had never seen the light than to establish a home, the pillars of which are treachery and the foundations deceit.

JEPHTHAH. O my father, would you shame your own blood before the eyes of all Mizpeh?

ELAD. You do well, my son, to remind me that she is of my blood. Is she not doubly dear to me, seeing my other sons and their children are all dead, and that through her and her children I hoped to see my name live on in Israel? But, dearer to me than my own blood is righteousness and fair dealing. Though every man in Mizpeh turn his hand to trick-

ery and applaud falsehood, still will I cry out against you. Though you seem to prosper in your evil, yet in the end will you think upon my warning, for you will know that it is without profit to cheat God.

NATHAN. Must I tell an elder in Israel that the husband and not the father of a betrothed maiden is her master? That if she is betrothed she is already as his wife and no man can take her from him.

ELAD. (*Bitingly*) If she be betrothed!

NATHAN. Her father consented to my suit a month of days ere he vowed her away.

ELAD. Is this a betrothal in Israel? Where were the witnesses, where the betrothal ring, the dowry bestowed upon the virgin, and the writing which bound her to you as your wife? (*He turns upon JEPHTHAH savagely.*) I have fought a good fight for your honor and I have failed. Save your child by a trick and deceive the God beneath Whose wings she would dwell in Israel. But may death close my eyes ere they behold the payment He will demand of the tricksters of Mizpeh. (*He turns to go, but NATHAN stands in his path.*)

NATHAN. I have sought to keep silent for I am but a youth and how dare I speak wrathfully to an aged head so honored in Israel? But no man shall say I win my bride by fraud and double dealing. (*He turns desperately to the people, drawing SHEILAH before them.*) I will not take her for my wedded wife until every voice in Mizpeh proclaim our nuptial blessing, until every tongue declare that he speaks not for the God whose honor he would defend, but out of the doubtful imagination of his own heart. (*He turns to ZEBUL.*) Zebul, you are the maker of music, the singer of God, and, being near His heart, you hear His voice. Speak, seer, and tell us, must the maiden die?

ZEBUL. (*Speaking slowly after a long pause*)

E'en I, the singer of God, must falter in my speaking, for how shall mortal man know the will of his Maker? But this I know—the smoke on grudging altars will not rise; the wreath of unwilling fingers place upon the shrine will wither in an hour. We must give gladly, if we give to Him.

SHEILAH. (*Stepping out quickly*) And I give gladly when I give myself.

NATHAN. (*Seeking to silence her*) You are mad.

SHEILAH. He is mad who would dissuade me. I have listened while the elders spoke and now I know that my father's vow must be fulfilled and that my feet must follow the path his words have made for me. (*She goes to him quietly.*) Father, since you have vowed unto the Lord, offering up my young life, even for the sake of Mizpeh, then do to me according to your vow.

NATHAN. No—Sheilah—

AMASA. (*Restraining him*) Nay, let the maiden speak.

SHEILAH. I do not know why this thing has come to me. Yesterday my life stretched before my feet like a meadow cool with streams and bright with flowers. I thought that God's hand would lead me along the quiet household ways my mother knew and that I would serve Him best by rearing strong sons to fight for Israel.

NATHAN. God would not have it otherwise, although your father again and yet again vowed away your life.

SHEILAH. (*With sudden spirit*) Think you I lay this thing upon God and believe in my heart that He desires such a sacrifice? Nay, for He is the God of love and pities all His creatures. Think you if I have care to feed the shy brown birds and sorrow o'er the flower my foot has trampled in passing,

that He, the Maker of the world will be less loving to the creatures He has made? Surely, He Himself will grieve for my death and pity me, cut off in the spring and promise of my years.

DINAH. Truly, He would take no delight in your death. Live and be happy and forget your father's vow.

SHEILAH. I might forget—but the men of Mizpeh would remember. If I live, then must his new-found honor die.

DINAH. (*Clinging to her*) What is his honor worth against your life? You are as my child and I would not live to weep above your grave. (*Turning to the people who shrink back.*) O men of Mizpeh, loose him from his vow.

SHEILAH. You see they do not answer. From the day of his birth has my father borne a shame not of his own making. The son of the foreign woman, what has he known but scorn from Gilead? And now that with his own blood he has bought a clean name among you, shall I permit him to lose it for my sake?

NATHAN. And what of me? Let the elders speak of witnesses and the ring of betrothal! What are these things to us who love one another? Before I asked your father for your hand, did not your eyes tell me your love was mine? Did not the touch of your hand before I followed your father to the wars bind us together even before God? (*He draws a broad gold bracelet from his girdle and slips it upon her wrist.*) This did you give to me on parting and I shall not rest until it becomes indeed the ring of betrothal and as my wife you cross the threshold of my house.

SHEILAH. (*Smiling sadly*) And what gifts could I bring my husband? Shame and the mockery of the men of Mizpeh because I am Jephthah's daugh-

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ter and live through his dishonor. Death would be easier than life with such a memory crouching beside our hearth.

NATHAN. (*Brokenly*) O Sheilah—Sheilah—

SHEILAH. (*With a touch of tenderness already strangely impersonal*) Nay, my Nathan, nay, old playmate—do not grieve that this great thing has come to me—to raise my father high before the people and make of my name a golden memory for all days. We little dreamed of this when in the spring-time we played together knee-deep among the meadow flowers. (*Her hands unconsciously caressing the flowers she picks from those tossed before JEPHTHAH, her eyes turned longingly toward the spring-flushed hills.*) I never thought that I should die in spring.

DINAH. (*Wailing*) You must not die!

(*The other women take up her lament with all the passionate grief of the Orient.*)

SHEILAH. (*Giving way at their voices*) Hearken, ye mountains, to my lamentations, and you, O hills, to the tears of my eyes. Rocks, testify to the weeping of my soul and to the grief that is in me. I have not been granted the joy of marriage nor was the wreath of my betrothal completed. I have not been decked with ornaments by the hand of the bridegroom, nor have I been scented with perfume and with myrrh. Alas, O Mother, it was in vain you gave me birth; the grave was destined to be my bridal chamber.

DINAH. (*Wailing*) The oil I prepared for your anointing must be spilled. The moths will eat the white garments I wove for your bridal.

SHEILAH. The bridal wreath my nurse twined for me will wither. (*She tears from her hair the*

myrtle entwined in her diadem.) I shall take no pride in my garments of purple and blue.

MAIDENS. We will lament over your passing—we will grieve because you have been cut off in the flower of your life.

SHEILAH. I have danced in the sunshine and sung in the early morning. (*Turning to maidens.*) Now must you rend your garments as I go alone into the darkness.

JEPHTHAH. (*Crying from his broken heart*) My daughter—O my daughter.

SHEILAH. (*Her own grief forgotten for his sake*) O my father, look upon my face. (*She raises his head from his arms, forcing him to look at her.*) Look at me, father. See—I am not afraid.

JEPHTHAH. (*Meeting her eyes at last*) What will you have of me, my daughter, in this heavy hour?

SHEILAH. Grant me that I may go with my companions up to the mountains to sojourn there while I grieve for my lost youth. Let me abide there two months with these maidens and they will lament with me as for one already dead. Yea, even the trees should weep for me and the birds mourn in their singing, seeing that I who so loved them must depart alone out of the land of the living. And when the two months are over, then will I come down into Mizpeh and you shall do to me according to your vow. (*JEPHTHAH nods, unable to speak. He embraces her silently. She turns to the maidens.*) Come with me and as we go we will gather flowers and sing merry songs—the songs the companions of the bride sing, when all rejoicing they bring her to her husband's house.

DINAH. (*As the girls gather about SHEILAH*) Child—child—have you no word for me?

SHEILAH. Dear, cross old Dinah—you must

never scold me again. Come, you will go with us to the city's gate. *(With her arm about DINAH, she goes to JEPHTHAH who stands with his face hidden, leaning against the doorpost. She looks at him longingly, is about to embrace him, shakes her head. Silently approaches ELAD and kisses the hem of his cloak. His face working with emotion, he blesses her. With a grave obeisance to AMASA and the other elders, is about to follow the singing maidens off toward Mizpeh, when NATHAN catches her hand.)*

NATHAN. Sheilah—is this your farewell to me?

(For a moment she sways against DINAH, then withdraws her hand and smiles up at him, a grave, detached smile.)

SHEILAH. In two months I shall return.

(The bridal music rises in happy chorus as she follows the maidens, supporting the weeping DINAH. For a moment there is silence among the people. Suddenly ZEBUL, with a passionate gesture, breaks the strings of his harp.)

ZEBUL. O harp that sang of triumph, be forever dumb. *(He points to the bowed figure of JEPHTHAH before his house.)*

(Slowly the festal procession wends its way toward Mizpeh, their grief-stricken faces in strange contrast to the bridal chorus of the maidens, who repeat again and again: "She will come to the bridegroom with rejoicing, with singing and the sound of harps!" Alone, JEPHTHAH tears the garlands of rejoicing from the doorposts of his house.)

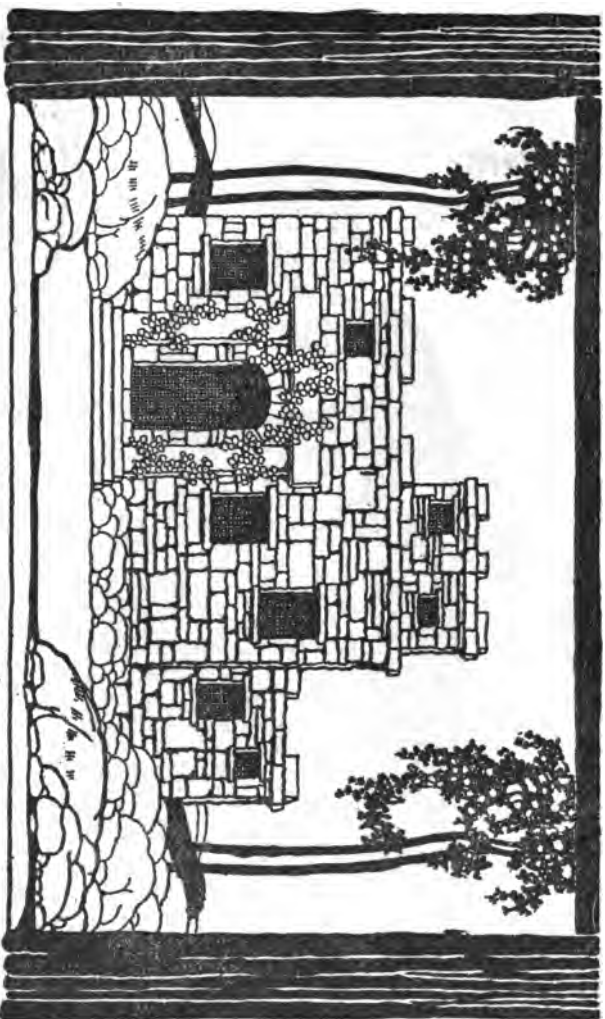
THE END

NOTES

To the Reader: According to later legends clustered about the tale of *Jephthah's Daughter*, she was named Sheilah, "the one who is demanded." These commentators also described Jephthah's mother as the woman of another tribe. This would account for the ill treatment Jephthah received at the hands of his brethren, as that time a woman who married out of her own tribe was held in great contempt. Even to this day many Orientals esteem the betrothal as binding as the marriage. And, should the reader feel that Nathan seems out of place in the rude atmosphere of the Judges, let him remember the gentle courtesy of Boaz who is of the same period.

To the Producer: The scenery may be as conventional as desired, the house of Jephthah being a small hut, almost primitive in design, the place before it wild and rugged, the gates and hills beyond Mizpeh showing faintly in the distance. On the other hand, the background may consist of curtains of a dark or neutral color with the house of Jephthah and its rude entrance indicated on the left. The director of the music should remember that the music of the Orient lacks what we are pleased to call "harmony" and should strive for the rhythmic chant characteristic of primitive music. If desired, the "songs" may be chanted or even spoken to the music of a harp or violin played off stage. The dances may be made elaborate or simple, according to the talent available, but in every case should suggest the color and the vigor of the East. The cast may be shortened to include only a handful of women and soldiers, or extended to include a large number of singers and dancers and younger children.

COSTUMES



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DESIGN SUGGESTING THE SETTING FOR JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER.



NATHAN. JEPHTHAH.
JOSIAH. AND. SOLDIERS.



• SHEILAH •



• ELAD •



·DINAH·



•AMASA•



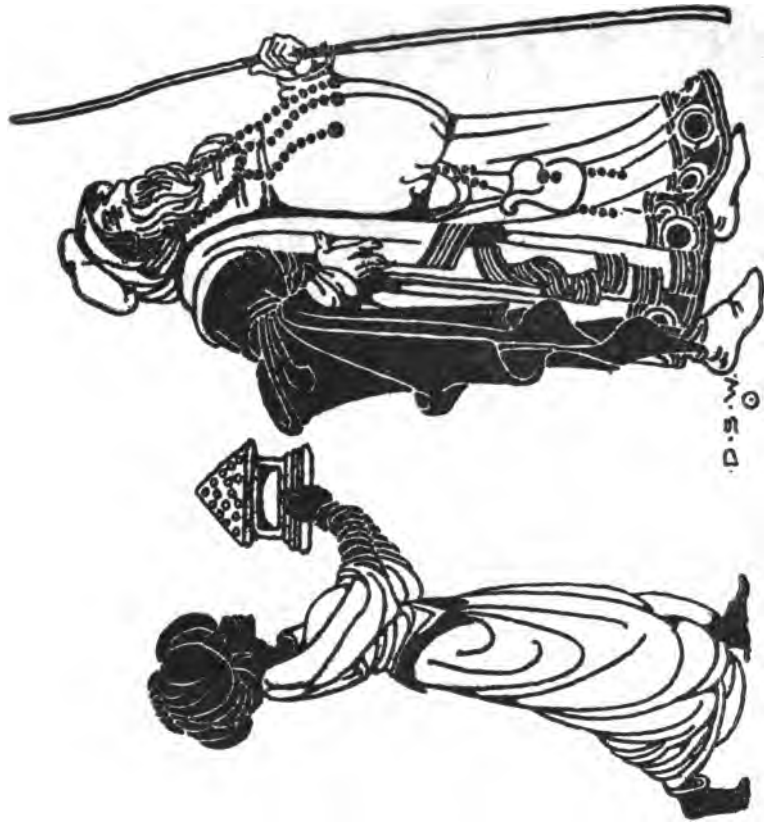
·RACHEL·
·MAY·ALSO·BE·USED·FOR·
·WOMEN OF MIZPAH·



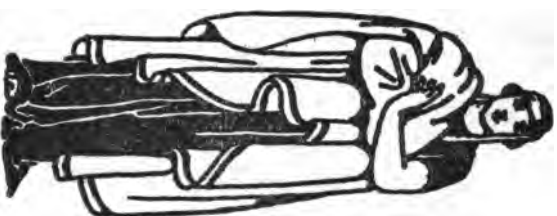
ZEBIL.



·MIEHAL· ·TIRZAM·
·MAY·ALSO·BE·USED·FOR·WOMEN·
·OF·MIZPAH·



·AN·OLD·MAN·RICHLY·CLAD·FOLLOWED·BY·
·SLAVE·CARRYING·GOLD·CASKEET·



•COSTUMES FOR MEN OF MIZPAH.

•THE DESIGNS FOR AMASA AND ELAD MAY ALSO BE USED.

WHY THE CHIMES RANG. A play in one act by Elizabeth McFadden. Adapted from the story of the same name by R. M. Alden. Especially recommended as a Christmas play because: It teaches the story of the Christ child, rather than the Byzantine legend of Santa Claus. It may be adapted to the ritual of any Christian denomination by slight changes of costume and setting. It offers a rare opportunity for exquisite church music. It may be given in the barest room, against a background of Christmas greens, or it may be presented with the most lavish equipment of a professional theatre, yet both productions will thrill the imagination and touch the heart. It teaches the beauty of a charity that gives heart and service as well as gold. Price, 35 cents.

THE CHRISTMAS STORY, dramatized by Virginia A. Griswold. This is the Bible story of the birth of the Christ, using the Bible language as far as possible. It lends itself to four scenes: The hill country of Judea, the throne-room of Herod, the marketplace in Bethlehem and the stable with the manger. It can be produced in the simplest manner on a platform, or with all the Oriental setting and accessories which the imagination and means can provide. Plays about an hour, and any number of people, adults and children, can be used. Makes an admirable Christmas entertainment and is well adapted for the use of churches and schools. Price, 35 cents.

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS. A Christmas play in three short acts by William Patterson Taylor. The NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS is a little play in three acts which may be produced well within an hour. The first act presents the wondrous and hurried night before Christmas preparation activities in Santa's workshop at the North Pole. The second act is a night before Christmas home bed-chamber incident, involving the desperate situation resulting from a childish difference between two brothers, which difference—"made up" true—introduces, also, the woeful possibilities of Santa's calamitous displeasure. (In this and the last act the children's classic, "The Night Before Christmas," is dramatized.) In the third act "All's well that ends well." A quartette supplies the music. This little play has *grown* during years of local use by the author and others. Its unbroken success in stirring and impressing the children (and the "grown-ups," too—whom, also, the author aimed to reach) was urged as a reason for its publication. Strongly recommended as an entertainment for the holiday season. Price, 30 cents.

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